

# The Light of Hope

INTRO: We will return to our series in Ephesians after the Christmas holidays. As you can tell by the children's sermon and the gigantic Christmas Tree, it is Advent season. So we will set Ephesians to the side to focus on the comings of Christ.

TRAN: To start off our series for Advent, I want to start with the story of a preacher that has faded into obscurity, but was once very well known across America.

- I. His name was Phillips Brooks
  - A. His life was someone difficult as he started out
    1. He graduated Harvard in 1855 at the age of 20
    2. He began to work as a school teacher of Latin in Boston
      - a) He loved Latin very much
      - b) However he found it difficult to teach because his students did not take the subject matter as seriously as he felt they should
    3. He lacked faith in himself at this point, writing "I do not care much of what will become of me"
  - B. However, in 1856 he enrolled in the Virginia Theological Seminary, in Alexandria
    1. After graduation in 1859 he was ordained as a deacon and became pastor over Church of the Advent in Philadelphia
    2. Later, in 1862, after being ordained a priest, he became pastor of Church of the Holy Trinity in Philadelphia
  - C. While Phillips Brooks may not have been a great teacher in the classroom, he found his calling as an orator in the pulpit
  - D. Basically, as soon as he moved into the church, he contacted a well known real-estate agent named Lewis Redner and convinced him to serve as Sunday School Superintendent and organist
    1. When they began, they had 30 children come that first Sunday for SS
    2. Within a year, the Sunday service and Wednesday Service was busting at the seams
    3. They had 1000 children coming to SS - largely due to Redner and Brooks
  - E. While Phillips Brooks fame spread across the country, he was growing tired physically and spiritually
    1. By this time it was 1863, and the country was embroiled in the most painful and bloody conflict we had ever experienced - the civil war
      - a) The National spirit was dying off as quickly as the soldiers
      - b) It seemed that everyone either knew someone that had died or was gravely injured on the battlefield

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- c) Women dressed in black from losing sons, and husbands
- d) Mourners as far as the eye could see
- 2. Brooks tried to push back the darkness, but it was beginning to overtake him and it showed in his services
- 3. The people looked to him for hope and inspiration
  - a) They wanted to believe that hope and peace would be theirs again
  - b) They desired an end to the war
- 4. He tried his best, but what they longed for most was what he could not give them: peace and a ceasing of the conflict
- F. Finally, and mercifully the Civil War came to an end
  - 1. Brooks was worn out but hopeful that life would soon return to the sheep under his care
  - 2. That hope would soon be shattered by another event that changed America - the assassination of President Lincoln
  - 3. Brooks was asked to give the address at Lincoln's funeral even though he was not Lincoln's pastor
    - a) While he felt honored
    - b) He also felt ill prepared
    - c) He was able to dig deep and find the words to comfort a nation in mourning
    - d) However, the experience left him feeling empty and not able to return to his church to give them what they needed
    - e) So Brooks took a trip to the Holy Land to help restore his own soul
- G. The sabbatical worked
  - 1. Brooks returned with a new life and renewed faith
  - 2. Everyone could see in all he did that he had been restored
- H. His time in Israel helped restore a waning faith
  - 1. Yet he had the most difficult time sharing with others the full impact it had on his life
  - 2. He used the phrase a "singing in my soul" which, despite being one of the 19th century's greatest preachers, he had a hard time relaying to others
    - a) To walk where Jesus walked
    - b) To see the sights and smell the smells of the land which has not changed much since Jesus time until his
  - 3. He wrote about the experience, saying, "Before dark we rode out of town to a field where they say the shepherds saw the star. It is a fenced piece of ground with a cave in it, in which, strangely enough, they put the shepherds...somewhere in those fields we rode through, the

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shepherds must have been. As we passed, the shepherds were still keeping watch over their flocks.”

- I. Brooks was planning for the Christmas season of 1868
    1. He began thinking of his experience in Israel and how to convey how special and intimate it was
    2. But this time, as he thought, he began to write without forcing ideas
    3. When he finished he rushed to Lewis Redner
      - a) When Redner read the poem he finally understood what Brooks had been trying to communicate for these past few years
      - b) So Redner was inspired to write music to accompany the lyrics
        - (1) He struggled for hours to get the music just right to help capture Brooks experience
        - (2) On December 24, 1868 he admitted he had failed
          - (a) Just like Brooks struggle to convey the experience
          - (b) So Redner failed to capture it in music
      - c) After he had stopped trying to “find the tune” and he had gone to bed - then is when the tune found him
        - (1) He wiped the sleep from his eyes and composed the music to go with Brooks poem
        - (2) We know this combination of inspiration today as “O Little Town of Bethlehem”
  - J. O Little Town of Bethlehem became a favorite in Philadelphia
    1. Almost every church in the city used the song in worship
    2. By the time of Brooks death, the song was one of the most beloved Christmas carols of all time
- II. The point of the story is simple, and fits so well with our theme
- A. Here you have a man who found himself at the end of his rope
    1. He has been through hell and back again
    2. Can you imagine trying to Pastor a church during the Civil War
      - a) I once had a week with two funerals in it and that was taxing
      - b) I cannot imagine what a pastor must have experienced during the time - possibly doing multiple funerals in a day
    3. He has been pouring himself out to the point where he has nothing left
    4. And just then, the leader of this nation is killed and he is asked to give out once again, only this time not to just his city, but to the entire nation
  - B. Here is a man hanging on the edge of hopelessness like few of us have experienced
  - C. Yet it is his experience with the story of the coming of Christ that shines the Light of Hope back into his life

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1. Go to Isaiah 9:2 “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.”
  2. We know that in Isaiah’s day it was a dark day indeed
    - a) The darkness referred to the manner in which God’s people kept treating each other
    - b) It referred to God’s judgment coming down on Judah because of their behavior which constantly turned a blind eye to God’s law
    - c) It referred to the instrument of judgment that God was using - foreign armies to carry them off to exile and destroy the land the people had their faith in
  3. This dark day easily parallels the darkness that the people experienced during the civil war
  4. But in Isaiah, in that day a promise was made, the promise of a light that shines in the darkness
    - a) For Israel in Isaiah’s day it was two things
      - (1) It was the promise that God would not judge the nation forever - that they are still His people even though they are being punished
      - (2) But more personally, it was a Person, the Person of Jesus Christ
    - b) For Brooks, in his darkness, it was that same Person, Jesus that brought the hope back into his life
- D. There are many of us that still go through dark times in life even now
1. Looking at the world around us, we see a lot of spiritual darkness - both outside and inside the church
  2. The darkness is so pervasive that even during this season of the year that should be so magnificent, sometimes the worst comes out
  3. So today I want to remind us of three simple things as we begin this season of Advent
- III. The Light of Hope still shines on you
- A. Hear the words of Isaiah again, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light...”
1. This is hope folks
  2. If you have been wandering in darkness, that light gives you hope for the present moment and hope for the future because a little light goes a long way
    - a) There have been many tests done to try to see how far away the human eye can detect light
    - b) I found a variety of answers on the internet, but we know that we can detect even a match light at a great distance in the dark
      - (1) Hence the warning for soldiers never to light more than one cigarette off of a match

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- (2) Because the enemy can fire upon you
  - B. No matter where life has taken you this year, no matter what changes have occurred
    - 1. If you have lost loved ones
    - 2. If you have had frustrating doctor's visits
    - 3. If you heard a diagnosis you thought was always "someone else, not me"
    - 4. If you have had relationship strains or breaks
    - 5. You need to hear that the light of hope that broke out and shone on the Jews back in Isaiah's day still shines on us today
  - C. Isaiah described the light as a "great light" - but truth be told, when the Light finally arrived in human space and time, it didn't seem that great
    - 1. Very few even noticed it shining
    - 2. Largely because the light of hope was shining in the face of a baby - Isaiah 9:6 "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given..."
    - 3. Theologian Paul Scherer put it this way, we can have hope in a world where, "Christmas comes out of a little stable, the Son of God out of a smelly little village, and twenty centuries of Christianity out of a tomb."
      - a) This little child grew up to take the sins of the world on His shoulders so that we could have eternal life
      - b) He is our hope and we celebrate His breaking forth with the light of hope in our lives
  - D. Sadly many miss this Light of Hope
    - 1. You watch so many scurry around at the mall, busily trying to finish off their Christmas lists
    - 2. Many believing that they are purchasing hope and happiness for those they love - all the while missing the true Light of Hope that shines on us all
- IV. Second, the Light of Hope will enable you to find your way
- A. The second half of our verse, "those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned."
    - 1. Mind you that the light is not here yet for Israel - it has been promised and is beginning to dawn - it is now visible
    - 2. But when light becomes visible, especially after you have been in "deep darkness" you can begin to see your path
  - B. Have you ever noticed that even a little light is sufficient to see your way
    - 1. There was a missionary, Virginia Law that told the story of a night sentry bringing her a message
    - 2. She noticed his lamp and commented that it did not give off much light
    - 3. His reply, "No, it doesn't, but it shines as far as I can step."

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- a) And that really is all the light we need
- b) That also is really a great definition of faith and life with Christ
  - (1) He often shines the light as far as we can step so that have to continue to depend on Him
- C. But the point is simple, when you see the Light of Hope shining, He will help you find your way
  - 1. No matter where you have been this year
  - 2. No matter how dark the darkness has been, the Light is shining on you still, and by the Light you can find your way
- V. The third thing about the Light of Hope, it can be shared by you
  - A. The Light helps you to find your way, but you have the privilege of sharing the Light so others can find their way as well
  - B. When you share the Light of Hope, you can accomplish much
    - 1. Look at verses 3-5
    - 2. God enlarges the nation and increases the joy because of the Light of Hope
      - a) When we share the Light of Hope, we bring joy to people's lives
      - b) Too often we think that when we ask people to accept Christ as their Savior, it is a burden
        - (1) There are now rules to live by
        - (2) There are difficulties the share
        - (3) And the fact is that is true
        - (4) However, as Scripture tells us, the commands of the Lord are not a burden - in fact they lift the burden
    - 3. It tells us that in verse 4 that the burden is lifted, the yoke is shattered
      - a) The reality is sin is the burden
      - b) Sin is the master - the yoke that we are saddled with
      - c) And it is in the coming of the Light of Hope that all of that can change
  - C. Part of how you share the Light of Hope is living a life of hope
    - 1. How many Christians have you heard that have sounded more like people in the world
      - a) "Oh I hope that everything will turn out alright"
      - b) They sound fearful and timid in the face of darkness
    - 2. We, of all people, should live bold lives based on a sure hope
      - a) In the midst of the darkness we may face, we hold strong to the hope we have
      - b) I remember when dad died, it's been ten years already, but I remember some of the people that came and mourned over him
        - (1) It was an honor to have them there and tell us their stories

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- (2) But some of them were more distraught than myself and my family was
- (3) When we entered that room, we knew that was just the shell of the man we loved
- (4) We knew that he was in heaven with Christ, and that we will see him again one day
- c) As believers we hold on to the hope that we have in Christ, knowing that it is never misplaced
3. And we live that hope out in front of the world
- D. I know there are some of you that this may have been one of the worst year's of your life
  1. You have struggled and strained
  2. You have been beaten down by circumstances in your life that are beyond your control
  3. And while you may not see it now, God is preparing you for a ministry to others that need hope
    - a) To sit across the table from someone and tell them that you have been through the same thing and there is hope - you lived through it, and Christ was your Rock
    - b) That is a strong ministry that no one can take away from you - that is a blessing from the Lord - even if at this moment you think I'm crazy because you are still in the middle of the darkness
- VI. Phillips Brooks found a renewed sense of faith in the Light of Hope
  - A. It was in walking the streets of Bethlehem on Christmas Eve that he began to understand how deep a hope he had in the Light that shone that first Christmas
  - B. Will you allow the Light of Hope to shine on you and in you
    1. Will you allow the "light that shines in the darkness" to bring you hope?
    2. Do you need your faith renewed?
    3. Do you need that light to shine all the brighter?
    4. Maybe you never understood what the this light was that we talk about at Christmas time before, and you need to come to the manger and let the Light of Hope, the Light of Christ shine on you
    5. My prayer is this light will renew us, strengthen us, and draw us in a closer walk with the child who is that light